

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF OPEN SPACES SOCIETY**
(limited company number 7846516, charity number 1144840)

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at
Friends House, Euston Road, London, and by videoconference
on Thursday 4 July 2024 at 11am

PRESENT

Dr Phil Wadey	(chairman)
Mr Stuart Bain	(treasurer)

and 36 other members of the society, plus ten members of staff and one guest.

APOLOGIES were received from 19 members.

WELCOME BY THE AGM CHAIRMAN

- 24/1 The AGM chairman, Phil Wadey, welcomed everyone to the meeting, saying that this was the third time we had held a hybrid AGM. He explained that the meeting would be recorded on zoom, and gave some tips about the protocol for using zoom.
- 24/2 This being the day of the general election, Phil said that shortly we should find out who will be forming the next government in the Westminster parliament, and the polls were suggesting that there could be a change. The society stood ready with clear suggestions of what we would like the new government to take on during the next parliament.
- 24/3 Our proposals included an early consultation on how to increase public access; the new government must treat access as a priority. In particular, we wanted to know that previous ministerial promises to provide green space within 15 minutes' walk of people's homes can be turned into practice.
- 24/4 We wanted the planning system to mandate the registration of town and village greens in every development over a certain size or density. The opportunity to register lost commons should apply to the whole of England. The government should

extend responsible freedom of access to woodlands, watersides, and water; and fund permanent new access rights, upgraded access for all unpowered and disabled users, and improved access along existing rights of way, where it is needed, under the Environmental Land Management Schemes, and by other means. It should impose a duty on county and unitary councils to enforce against unlawful encroachments on commons, and require local authorities to provide funding for, and management of, open spaces. We proposed a simple, public-notice system for getting blocked paths reopened, and the repeal of the damaging Path Extinguishment Day provision, to prevent the removal of public rights from the hundreds of miles of unrecorded and under-recorded rights of way.

- 24/5 The chairman requested participants to limit the time of their contributions to five minutes maximum for proposers of motions, and three minutes for all other speeches.
- 24/6 He explained that all statutory voting had been done by proxy this year. Should any other business come before the meeting, there might need to be tellers and scrutineers. He proposed that Sarah Hacking and Lucy McKean be appointed to these roles. This was seconded by Stuart Bain, and agreed.
- 24/7 The chairman reported that 100 votes were cast and, in accordance with the mood of those who voted, he had applied all the proxies in favour of the motions.

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON 6 JULY 2023

- 24/8 It was agreed that the minutes be approved and signed: the voting was 91 in favour, none against, and nine abstentions.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- 24/9 **Minute 23/9:** Locked gates at Primrose Hill Park, London Borough of Camden. The general secretary reported that the society, with CPRE London, had written to the Royal Parks to complain about the locked gates and to ask for a meeting. This did not elicit a helpful response, but the Royal Parks then applied for planning permission from Camden Borough, to which the society and many others objected. Camden insisted on the Royal Parks agreeing the times of the closures, which the Royal Parks had rejected, and it had then discovered that it could erect the gates under permitted development. Thus, we had reached an impasse and were considering next steps.
- 24/10 **Post AGM item 6:** Michael Green (Darlington) gave an update on Blackwell Park in Darlington, about which he and his wife Angela had spoken last year. The planning application for restoration had gone through, and £760,000 had been released in January. They were still working on the dedication of the land as a town green. He thanked the society for its support and the story in autumn *Open Space*.

ADOPTION OF TRUSTEES' REPORT FOR 2023

- 24/11 The adoption of the annual report was proposed by Phil Wadey and seconded by John Hall.
- 24/12 The general secretary, Kate Ashbrook, presented the trustees' report and gave some updates.



- 24/13 Kate opened by listing a number of the society's successes over the past 18 months, such as the removal of unlawful gates from a restricted byway in Stanwick St John, North Yorkshire; the saving of Hanover Green Road in Gloucestershire from closure and the imminent removal of illegal obstructions; the reopening of a footpath at St Ervan in Cornwall; the voluntary registration of two village greens in Thames Ditton, Surrey; the prevention of accessways over Sneedham's Green Common in Gloucestershire; the continuing right to backpack camp on the Dartmoor commons; the registration of 12 lost commons; the prevention of deregistration of Yateley Common in Hampshire; and the challenge to Swansea Council's disposal of open space on Kilvey Hill, and at Waunarlwydd playing field. These were just a few of the differences we had made, often working with others, but there were many more hidden victories, achieved through our response to 975 cases last year and, already, 460 this year. We were keen to hear from members the outcome of cases with which we have helped.
- 24/14 The society was focusing on legal action. Members had given generously to our legal-action fund so that we could support members and the society's own actions, many of them through our local correspondents. Kate spoke about our plans to lobby the new government on the issues set out by the chairman in his introduction. There were parallels to be drawn with 1949 when the society and others promoted the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, the 75th anniversary of which we celebrated this year. It was an exciting time with great opportunities, and we needed to be both visionary and practical in our requests.
- 24/15 Kate ended by thanking the trustees, local correspondents, other volunteers, staff, and members for their support and activities throughout the year.
- 24/16 The adoption of the annual report was carried by 97 votes for, none against, and three abstentions.

ADOPTION OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2023

- 24/17 The adoption of the annual accounts was proposed on behalf of the board of trustees by the treasurer, Stuart Bain, and seconded by Dave Howerski.
- 24/18 The treasurer presented the accounts, explaining that the income from donations and legacies was lower in 2023 after an exceptional year in 2022. The legal-action fund had raised £28,000 in 2023 and donations were still coming in. The increase in expenditure from the previous year was attributed in part to an increase in staff costs, with the appointment of the case officer (enforcement).
- 24/19 The investments had experienced market volatility with a loss of more than £20,000, but the losses had not crystallised as no withdrawals had taken place. The trustees had engaged JM Finn investment advisers to review our investment portfolio to ensure it remained fit for purpose.
- 24/20 Mary-Ann Ochota (Hertfordshire) asked whether the society had a policy for ethical investments. The treasurer replied that we were exploring these with our advisers to ensure that our investments align with our charitable objectives.

- 24/21 The adoption of the annual accounts was carried by 98 votes for, none against, and two abstentions.

ELECTION OF VICE-PRESIDENTS AND MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Vice Presidents

- 24/22 Tara-Jane Sutcliffe had proposed and John Hall had seconded the election of the vice-presidents. In Tara-Jane's absence, Graham Bathe spoke about them to the meeting. He said that we were fortunate to have such wonderful professional people as our vice-presidents. They were all elected as follows:

Name	Votes for	Votes against	Abstentions
Diane Andrewes	99	1	0
David (Lord) Clark	99	1	0
Mike Clarke	97	1	2
Roger de Freitas	98	1	1
Richard Mabey	97	1	2

Trustees

- 24/23 The chairman explained that there were six vacancies on the board of trustees, and three candidates: Stuart Bain (proposed by Phil Wadey and seconded by Graham Bathe), Chris Beney (proposed by Phil Wadey and seconded by Hazel Beney), and John Hall (proposed by Jack Jennings and seconded by Chris Jennings), who were seeking re-election after three years. The voting was as follows:

Name	Votes for	Votes against	Abstentions
Stuart Bain	99	0	1
Chris Beney	98	0	2
John Hall	99	0	1

The three trustees were therefore elected to serve for a further three years.

- 24/24 The chairman expressed his thanks to Simon Hunt, who had not sought re-election as a trustee.
- 24/25 He also introduced two new trustees whom the board had co-opted earlier in the year, James Lean and Andrew Packman, welcoming the addition of skills and new perspectives to the board.

APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS FOR 2023

- 24/26 The treasurer reminded members that we had last year carried out a tender exercise and the trustees had unanimously agreed to continue to use Villars Hayward as the firm provided the best value for money and the service we needed. Stuart Bain proposed, and Graham Bathe seconded the motion to appoint Villars Hayward, chartered accountants and registered auditors of Henley-on-Thames as independent examiners for 2024. The voting was 99 for, none against, and one abstention.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Open Space

- 24/27 Robert Bromham (Surrey) thanked the society for *Open Space* magazine which gave him a boost because it was full of victories, with no advertising.

Byways open to all traffic (BOATs)

- 24/28 Peter Foulkes (Powys) asked the society to review its opinions on BOATs as he considered that the society should campaign to protect BOATs from damage. He was concerned about the abuse of the historic Monks' Trod by vehicular users, and Powys County Council's proposal to surface it (which would not address the problem). The general secretary replied that it was against the society's charitable objectives to support the extinguishment of rights and so we had not become involved. However, we might support management options, and a traffic regulation order might be a possibility.
- 24/29 Jess Tyler (case officer, enforcement) added that she was familiar with Monks' Trod, and that Powys County Council was between a rock and a hard place. If it were to consider downgrading the route it would get opposition from the strong trail-riders' lobby, and even if the route were to be downgraded, the illegal use and the damage it caused would continue. It was really an environmental issue, and the legal and environmental positions do not always tally.
- 24/30 Mary-Ann Ochota suggested that the society might take on the role of an honest broker between the various interests in cases such as these. The chairman said that the representative user groups had codes of conduct and the problems were caused by those who were not part of formal organisations. It was a complex issue, but we would consider her suggestion.
- General secretary's 40 years**
- 24/31 The chairman said that in April the society had marked Kate Ashbrook's 40 years in post as general secretary, an incredibly long time to be at the helm of the organisation, and campaigning actively throughout. Earlier in the year we had a lunch to celebrate, and the trustees have bought Kate a tree to mark the occasion. The audience then enjoyed a video which had been made by Abbie Cavendish, our digital marketing and content manager, to mark her 40 years.
- 24/32 The chairman proposed a vote of thanks to Kate for her long service to the society and hopefully for many more years to come. This was seconded in several places and carried unanimously.
- 24/32 The chairman thanked members and staff for joining the meeting and for their contributions. In particular, he thanked Sarah Hacking and Lucy McKean for all their work in organising the hybrid AGM. He closed the formal meeting at 12.03 hours.
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Following the AGM, members gave presentations as follows.

- 1 Colin Saunders (London): The Graham Butler Mile, part of the Vanguard Way long-distance path where seven stiles have been replaced by gates in memory of Graham Butler, who was a member of OSS.
- 2 Dave Ramm (local correspondent for Hampshire): Enough of this nonsense! The fight against solar farms across or near public rights of way.
- 3 Phil Escritt (local correspondent for St Albans City and District, Herts): Radlett Strategic Rail Freight Interchange: public rights of way in the country park—how to achieve mitigation measures.